

# Ice fishing really a hole lot of fun

If you can stay warm, this Midwest sport is a cool winter pastime, even for Oregonians

By **BOAZ HERZOG**  
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**RILEY**—The cracks on the ice zigged and zagged like lightning bolts, stretching out of sight. They gave a first-time ice fisherman the chills—even more than the sub-freezing temperatures.

Convinced that the ice was safe to traverse, Jerry Farstvedt of Hines jumped up and down inches from the crack.

"That'll hold quite a bit of weight," said Farstvedt, 63, a retired Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist and longtime ice fisherman.

Still, that doesn't change the fact his thermometer read 17 degrees when he pulled up to Chickahominy Reservoir at 8 a.m. last Sunday. And that he spent the rest of the day there. Outside. With nothing around but miles of rolling sage, the occasional howls of coyotes and more than a dozen others huddled around holes in the ice.

"It beats watching 'Oprah,'" said Farstvedt, clad in overalls and a thick red jacket. "Football season's over. What else are you gonna do?"

His two city-slicker guests thought of plenty of alternatives. But for Farstvedt and others who enjoy the outdoors, don't mind the cold and own the right equipment, fishing in the dead of winter is a pleasant pastime.

This winter's deep freeze attracted anglers from far and near last weekend to the 530-acre Chickahominy Reservoir, about 30 miles west of Burns. Their prey, hidden under a snow-swept barrier 13 inches thick in places: fast-growing rainbow trout.

The anglers arrived with all manner of gear. Nothing fancy.

In parts of the Midwest, ice fishing villages sprout up each winter, complete with street names, portable huts with generators and even makeshift bars. Modern ice-fishing gizmos include a GPS that charts the body of water and includes an electronic fish finder, underwater camera or both.

Most Oregonians keep it simple, making do with rod, line, hook, bait and bucket. Flip the bucket over for a seat. Or bring a lawn chair.

Farstvedt drilled his hole with an auger from Minnesota. It resembled a giant corkscrew.

Robin Pierce of Burns revved up his chainsaw several hundred yards away.

He and his wife, Nancy, with

14-year-old son Sam, had rumbled to the center of Chickahominy on an all-terrain vehicle, their second consecutive day on the ice. Some anglers tempting fate (and defying warnings) drive trucks onto the reservoir.

"I wouldn't be beyond driving my rig out here as long as I stay close to shore," Robin Pierce said.

"Not me," his wife said.

Around lunchtime, the smell of hot dogs wafted up from their grill, perched on a trailer attached to the ATV. Dinner—two trout caught that morning—lay off to the side. Their rods dangled off footlong blocks of ice Robin Pierce had carved with his chainsaw.

He had tried drilling with an auger the previous day but gave up after a pin came loose, fell and sank to the bottom of the reservoir. Cutting through the ice is easier with a chainsaw anyway, Pierce said.

Watch out, though, for the ya-hoos who get carried away and cut out holes larger than Oregon law allows, which is 12 inches in diameter. Pierce said he spotted a few holes the day before twice that size.

"An average guy can fit through one of those holes," he said.

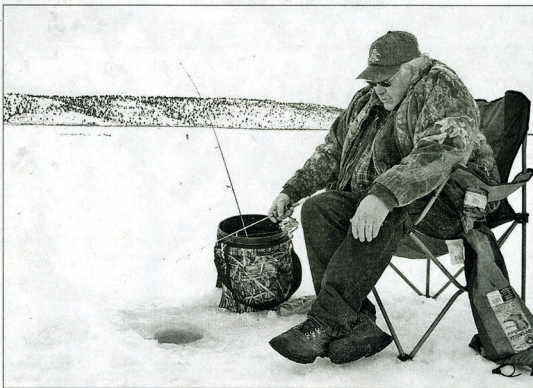
The Pierces, who run a second-hand store in Burns, have ice-fished for more than two decades.

"It was kind of freaky the first couple of times," Nancy Pierce said.

Robin Pierce said he wants to see the ice at least 4 inches thick before venturing out. Nancy prefers at least 6.

Robin Pierce said he enjoys the challenge.

"These fish, they're always



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Bill Myers of Salem, asked if he camped out, replies, "No, we camped out at a motel. We're not stupid."

fighting like crazy," he said.

Son Sam said he simply liked "the quiet."

Back toward Farstvedt, but closer to shore, Larry Menden of Dallas was soaking up his second day of ice angling in a lawn chair.

His haul: one small trout. No matter.

"Even if I don't catch any more, I'm having fun," said Menden, 59. "A bad day fishing is still better than a good day at work."

Menden had joined his son, who brought a group of friends and coworkers from the Budweiser plant in Salem. The post-Super Bowl weekend outing has become an annual tradition for the group.

It started about 20 years ago on lakes near John Day, said Bill Myers, who retired from Budweiser five years ago. The group tried lakes around Baker City next. The anglers spent the last five years near Prineville, until

nine of them sought out Chickahominy this year.

Myers said he likes getting away from city life. And he enjoys the novelty of ice angling.

"You run into people all the time that say, 'Ice fishing in Oregon?'" said Myers, 62. "You camped out? No, we camped out at a motel. We're not stupid."

The group of nine had reeled in 18 fish.

Back at the Farstvedt camp, two trout, one a 16-inch, flopped around on the ice. Farstvedt had thrown back at least two smaller ones. Half a dozen others, Farstvedt had reeled in his line, only to discover the biting fish had ripped it off. He wondered if his knot was creating a weak spot.

As he rehooked his line with bare hands, ripping off a new section with his teeth, Farstvedt wobbled his legs back and forth to keep the blood flowing. He lowered the line back down

nearly six feet.

Every now and then, a drum-beat sound—ice churning, contracting and expanding—echoed over the reservoir. The beats became more frequent as the day wore on. Nothing to worry about, Farstvedt said.

Anglers should, however, be concerned about ice fishing when March rolls around. Decades ago, a springtime ice angler drowned in Chickahominy, Farstvedt said. As the story goes, a big sheet of ice, worn thin by the warmer temperatures, suddenly cracked. It tipped up, sending anglers sliding into the frigid water. To be sure, such horror stories are rare.

"If you use some common sense," Farstvedt said, "this is safe."

But dress warm. Because there's no getting around the cold.

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An ice fisherman leans against his all-terrain vehicle as he waits for a bite at Chickahominy Reservoir, about 30 miles west of Burns.